

Journeys in Latin American Studies and at the Nexus between Academia and International Affairs: Part 2

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In my essay for the Program Book of the 2024 LASA Congress, I provided some educational, family, and personal background in discussing how I became a “Latin Americanist.” I emphasized how my early activities and several choices along the way reflected serendipity as much as or more than deliberate career planning. I also noted that personal exposure to Kalman H. Silvert—a noteworthy scholar, Ford Foundation official, and first president of LASA, had an important influence on me from an early stage.

My college years at Harvard comprised a classic liberal education: majoring in US history; taking courses in the social sciences, natural sciences, and humanities; learning how to write clear prose; and preparing papers on topics ranging from the John Birch Society to the issues posed for US democracy by a potential presidential candidate who was a Catholic. By the time I finished my senior year, I had taken courses in US diplomatic history and US relations with the Far East, and I had prepared an undergraduate honors thesis—supervised by McGeorge Bundy, then Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences—on the efforts of President Franklin D. Roosevelt to prepare the isolationist US public for the likelihood of war with Germany and Japan. My thesis was very well received.

I had no particular interest in Latin America at this stage, and indeed was one of the students who passed up the opportunity to hear Fidel Castro speak at Harvard football stadium, introduced by Dean Bundy, shortly after Fidel took power in Havana.

After college I was undecided about what to do, applied for different options, was accepted to all, and finally chose to attend Harvard Law School, as much to be in the same city as my girlfriend as for any other reason.

I enjoyed some of my first-year law courses, but soon realized that I was more interested in reading *Foreign Affairs* in the library than focusing on the assigned cases. That realization led me to switch to the master’s program at the Harvard Graduate School of Public Administration (GSPA). My interest in Latin America began to increase because of two stimuli: the Bay of Pigs invasion and the Alliance for Progress, both US responses to the Cuban revolution, and the practical advice of the School’s Dean (Don K. Price) that those of us in the two year master’s program should concentrate on something different from what we had focused on as undergraduates. In the fall of 1962, I took courses on US-Latin American relations with John Plank, who soon left for Washington to advise the Kennedy administration on the Alliance, and on the Soviet Union, taught by Merle Fainsod, then one of the top US specialists on the USSR. I was very interested in both courses and did well on my exams and term papers.

After some reflection, I consulted William Barnes, a law school professor who headed the Latin American Center, about my options. I told him that I found the reading material on the Soviet Union to be much superior to that in the Latin America course, suggesting to me that perhaps I should concentrate on Latin America, where there might be greater opportunities. He warmly endorsed my reasoning and was

helpful in arranging support to study Spanish at Harvard summer school. It is there that I audited Kalman Silvert's course, often talked with him after class, and developed a lifelong friendship. My wife Janet and I took a two-week trip to the Dominican Republic to practice our Spanish and to poke around for materials that I could use in writing term papers in my second year, particularly for John Montgomery's course on the politics of foreign aid. I wrote a 22-page memorandum of observations and impressions, which Barnes told me I should publish when the Dominican president was overthrown a couple of weeks later; this started a process that led to my first publication in *Harper's* magazine on "The Dominican Republic: The Limits of American Power."

In my two years at GSPA, I took a course on Latin America with the Chilean historian José Donoso, who told us on the first day that we would not deal with Mexico, Central America, or the Caribbean because "this history relates more closely to the United States," a classic *cono sur* comment that has affected my thinking ever since. I also took a course with former president José Figueres of Costa Rica, who introduced us to Latin America's democratic left, and wrote a term paper on the Organization of American States in a course taught by William Y. Elliott that, together with my directed reading course with Ernest May and my later observations in the Dominican Republic, made me more aware than most that the OAS was less a multilateral governance organization than an alliance system intended from the US perspective to legitimate US leadership in the Americas and from Latin American perspectives, to constrain US interventionism. I drew on my Dominican trip and some tenacious additional research to write a paper for Dr. Montgomery's course, which he decided to publish in *Public Policy*, a GSPA yearbook mostly dedicated to faculty contributions.¹

I also attended quite a few lectures on Latin America, of which two are etched in my memory: one by Helio Jaguaribe, a very dynamic and

articulate Brazilian political scientist, and the other by Israel Klabin, a sparkling business executive, also Brazilian, with strong intellectual interests. Both were to become longtime friends.

As the end of my second year of graduate school approached, I suddenly panicked with the realization that I was expected to enter the job market. I reacted by asking Professor Montgomery whether he would support my application to enter the PhD program in Government. He noted the quality of the writing I had done on the Dominican Republic after only two weeks in the country, suggested that I was ready for more exposure to the region and that I should spend two or three years working in Latin America, after which he would certainly support me for the doctoral program if I were still interested.

With no job prospects in sight, serendipity crossed my path again. Judge Charles Wyzanski, a friend of my parents, a mentor while I was in college, and a member of the Board of the Ford Foundation, sent me a handwritten note drawing my attention to the Foundation's "training associate" program designed to recruit people at the master's level to apprenticeships for one to two years in its Latin American program. I applied, was accepted, and was assigned to serve as an assistant to the Foundation's main grantee in the Dominican Republic, a nongovernmental economic development organization—the *Asociación para el Desarrollo*—in the country's second city, Santiago de los Caballeros.

For the next two years, I worked as an assistant to the president of the *Asociación*, Tomás Pastoriza: a business executive in the textile sector, civic leader, institution-builder, and remarkable mentor. Under his demanding coaching, I began to learn fluent Spanish, new analytic skills, more effective expository style, and institutional savvy that would later advance my hybrid career.

The Dominican government was overthrown about six months after I arrived in Santiago by a military coup that was organized by supporters of

¹ Abraham F. Lowenthal, "Foreign Aid as a Political Instrument: The Case of the Dominican Republic" *Public Policy* (1965).

the former democratically elected president, Juan Bosch, who had himself been ousted in a 1963 coup. I began to think about why these coups occurred and why this particular one triggered a US military intervention involving more than 23,000 troops in direct contradiction to the Good Neighbor policy announced by President Roosevelt in the 1930s, barring further US unilateral military interventions in Latin America.

For the next year and a half, I combined work for the *Asociación*, including a political history of the country's long-discussed but until then never constructed major river valley development project as well as issues in educational and economic policy. I worked on the formation of a *Comité de Estudios Dominicanos*, which eventually became a significant Dominican social science organization. I also taught the first course in political science at the new Catholic University and combined various other development projects with research on Dominican politics and on the US intervention, using these materials to begin preparing to write my eventual doctoral dissertation on the Dominican intervention of 1965.

My dissertation was based on extensive research, including more than 150 interviews (in Spanish and English) in the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, and the United States, all but eleven of whom (all US intelligence officers) are listed alphabetically in the book. I had no experience or training in doing interviews, but I intuitively developed techniques that elicited a great deal of relevant information. I also persuaded a couple of senior US diplomats working on the Dominican Republic to help me obtain security-cleared access to hundreds of classified public documents, including the entire cable traffic from early 1965 through June 1965 between the US embassy in Santo Domingo and the State Department in Washington as well as unpublished notes, manuscripts, tape recorded telephone conversations, and other restricted

material plus numerous books, articles, and other materials in the public domain, most of them not easily accessible.

My dissertation and subsequent book (*The Dominican Intervention*, published by Harvard University Press in 1972) made two main points: first, what the US government at the highest levels most feared—a “second Cuba,” in that instance—structured the information the bureaucracy collected and focused upon, and what the State Department and intelligence agencies emphasized and communicated to the president, thereby skewing perceptions, leading to faulty and costly decisions.

Second, I underlined that foreign policy is often made not through broad and deliberate strategic choices but rather, one decision at a time, by busy officials who often do not question the premises and mindsets under which they are operating. These tendencies, obviously not limited to the Dominican case, were very well documented in my treatment, and they continue to be highly relevant to foreign policymaking. Think of US policies in Vietnam, Central America in the 1980s, Iraq, Afghanistan, Israel, Palestine and the Middle East.

Beyond the Dominican Republic: Thinking about US relations with the countries and territories of its “Near Abroad”

As I worked on my dissertation at Brookings in 1968-1969, I also became interested in the broader and underlying historic pattern of US relations with the entire Caribbean Basin region, including the Caribbean islands, the nations of the Central American isthmus, and those on the northern tier of South America, i.e., the “Near Abroad” of the United States.² For decades, the United States had largely ignored the small and often poor and weak countries and territories of the Caribbean Basin, until and unless Washington officials perceived that an extra-hemispheric power might be ready to challenge US regional

² The phrase “Near Abroad” was introduced into the vocabulary of US specialists on international relations by Strobe Talbott, then Moscow correspondent for *Time* in the 1970s. Richard Feinberg and I have long been using this phrase in our writing on US relations with its closest neighbors.

dominance. In those circumstances, Washington frequently intervened militarily and also became actively involved in economic and social development programs—at least for a time. But these programs generally faded as soon as the perceived threat receded. Such interventions and eventual withdrawals often left resentments that fueled nationalist and anti-U.S. sentiment and often led to more trouble down the road.

I began to talk with others about how the United States might conceive of and promote its interests in ways that would more consistently and effectively advance both national aims and international norms. I learned that a career US ambassador, Milton Barrall, had been asked by Secretary of State Dean Rusk to coordinate an internal task force to look 25 years into the future, to define the preferred state of US-Caribbean Basin relations in that time frame, and to suggest new US policy initiatives that might increase the likelihood that the desired conditions could be achieved within a quarter-century.

I persuaded Ambassador Barrall to let me read the classified report if I did not take verbatim notes. In its preface, the report noted that members of the task force at their first session agreed that 25 years was far too long into the future to say anything meaningful. Cuba and Puerto Rico, in turn, presented special and difficult political issues that the task force could not address in the time available. The group thus revised its terms of reference to consider what specific US policy initiatives could improve US relations with the Caribbean region, minus Cuba and Puerto Rico, within five years.

The resulting report was predictably cautious and unimaginative. When I asked Mr. Barrall what the budgetary impact would be of accepting all the task force's recommendations, he replied, "Hardly any." The whole experience led me to wonder whether strategic planning could be effectively

done within the US government and whether someone with my interests and aims might have more impact on policy from outside government than from within it. This intuition no doubt affected my decisions to decline invitations to enter government service in 1975, 1977, and 1993 in the Ford, Carter, and Clinton administrations.³

In 1969, I gave a lecture at Johns Hopkins SAIS on how to improve US thinking about and relations with the Caribbean Basin region. I suggested that the United States has a long-term and significant national interest in the socioeconomic conditions and the public institutions of its closest neighbors. I argued that this interest did not actually derive primarily, as traditionally argued, from the possibility that extra-hemispheric powers might take advantage of Caribbean Basin circumstances to challenge the United States militarily. Rather, I argued that the combined facts of high birth rates, low economic growth, gross inequities, oligarchic governance, civil unrest, and violence—plus proximity to the United States—would likely cause long-term and perhaps irreversible flows of irregular migration into our country. These flows could pose various challenges for US society, at home and internationally, creating "intermestic" issues combining international and domestic facets that would be complex to manage and might conceivably lead to renewed interventions.

I proposed that it is in the national interest of the United States to invest substantially and on a sustained basis in the socioeconomic and political development of these nearby countries and territories. The United States should aim to contribute to a more stable, peaceful, and congenial neighborhood; and to nurture better conditions for the residents of these countries and for its own investors, firms, and tourists. Above all, the United States should try to decrease the pressures for mass migration from its periphery. To achieve these goals, I called for

³ I was invited by Assistant Secretary of State, William D. Rogers, to serve as his assistant in the Ford administration; approached by Anthony Lake to join the National Security Council at the beginning of the Carter administration and recruited by Joseph S. Nye to join his team at the beginning of the Clinton administration. I declined the invitations each time, not as a fundamental lifetime choice but one that eventually had that result. In retrospect, I think my analytic and institution-building careers would have benefitted from direct experience in government policymaking, and surely my academic work on policy choices would have been enriched.

a comprehensive, long-term U.S. program to assist the development of the Caribbean Basin and Central American countries and territories. I continue today US to think that such a program should be a high priority US foreign policy objective.⁴

As soon as I finished my talk, I was approached at the podium by Dr. Luigi Einaudi, who had recently come to Washington as an advisor to then-Secretary of State Henry Kissinger. Dr. Einaudi said that he agreed absolutely with my central argument, but that to get a hearing I needed to reframe it as necessary in order to counter and prevent Communist influence in the region. Only on that basis, he emphasized, would Congress appropriate the needed resources. Einaudi's observation made me much more aware of the tension in policy-oriented research between academic analysis and what it takes to get attention paid to new ideas within a system often dominated by outmoded concepts and conflicting bureaucratic, political, economic, and other vested interests. This tension and how to manage it has continued to interest me over the years.

That optic was reinforced in the following year by another conversation. After working for a year in Lima for the Ford Foundation, I spent a week in July 1970 doing interviews with decision-makers and opinion-shapers in different sectors to assess Peru's sociopolitical situation and prospects. Among others, I interviewed the deputy chief of mission of the US Embassy. I asked him what had surprised him during the year, expecting him to focus on one of the major reform projects undertaken by the left-leaning "Revolutionary Government of the Armed Forces." To my surprise, he said that he had been shocked when the Peruvian government announced a major commercial agreement to sell millions of tons of fishmeal to Cuba. Because Peru was desperately trying to augment its foreign exchange, I had thought that its fishmeal deal with Havana was entirely logical, by no means surprising. But to

an American diplomat who was part of a US government apparatus working hard to isolate Cuba for Cold War reasons, the Peruvian decision was utterly unacceptable if not incomprehensible. Mindsets are powerful, structuring what is noticed and shaping responses.

Combining policy research and institution-building

In the rest of this essay, I discuss my general approach to research on policy-relevant issues and then turn to some key challenges of my institution-building experience that were mostly invisible externally but required continuing vigilance and recurrent management. My hybrid career has followed two demanding and fulfilling paths, each with its own aims, methods, challenges, and colleagues.

Over the years, I have come to accept that Latin American and Caribbean issues likely will *not* ordinarily receive much sustained high-level attention in the US government, or for that matter from other sectors of US society. There are too many other issues to leave much time or resources in Washington for dealing with the many countries of Latin America. Pious appeals to pay more attention will not change that reality.

What US policymakers need, I came to think, is not *more* attention but *higher quality* attention—on the basis of more refined concepts, more appropriate mindsets, sounder premises, more extensive and accurate data, and better organizing questions to guide US policy debates regarding relations with Latin America. I devoted much of my academic work thereafter to framing questions, challenging premises and mindsets, and trying to improve mutual comprehension.

The heart of such analysis in academic work and for policymakers is to ask questions that get at key drivers and scenarios, the answers to which are not self-evident but can be addressed (at least tentatively and plausibly) by finite research,

⁴ See, for example, Abraham F. Lowenthal, "The United States and its Near Abroad: From Hegemonic Presumption and intermittent Intervention towards Strategic Cooperation," in Eric Hershberg and Tom Long, eds., *North American Regionalism: Stagnation, Decline, or Renewal?* (Santa Fe, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2023), 245-259.

and that will hold the researcher's interest long enough to respond persuasively—and soon enough to be relevant to decision-making.

As a researcher interested in policy issues, I have worked on several such questions:

- With most of South America ruled by authoritarian regimes in the late 1970s and 1980s, was there an effective way to study the prospects for transitions from authoritarian rule, not as an exercise in wishful thinking but as a project of “thoughtful wishing,” that is, normatively driven but empirically based upon conceptually rigorous research about the space and techniques available for opening up authoritarian regimes?⁵
- What can be learned from decades of US-Latin American relations about the special circumstances in which the influence of the United States and of its policies has sometimes been exerted to improve the prospects for strengthening democratic governance, and about how to do so successfully without undermining self-determination and self-government? What accounts, however, for the several occasions when the influence of US foreign policy undermined self-determination in Latin America, the Caribbean Basin, and Central America?⁶
- What challenges are posed by Mexico's proximity and growing interdependence with the United States, and especially with California? How can Californians define and promote their international interests without violating constitutional constraints on state action? How can Californians build “cosmopolitan capacity,” that is, the ability of its

citizens and organizations to better understand and respond to international challenges and opportunities?⁷

- Sergio Bitar and I then drew upon previous work about democratic transitions and extensive new face-to-face interviews we conducted with top political leaders in nine nations who successfully managed shifts from authoritarian rule to democratic governance in the 1980s and 1990s, to develop ideas about how these somewhat unlikely transitions were actually achieved.⁸
- More recently, with an excellent group of colleagues assembled by the Wilson Center's Venezuela Working Group, I drew on that research by others and ourselves to examine how Venezuelans and their international supporters could be more effective in developing and promoting strategies to establish the necessary conditions to turn away from civic strife and worsening polarization in that country toward new visions, strategies, and tactics that might facilitate peaceful coexistence and an eventual transition toward democratic governance.⁹

In a field and time when so many scholars seem determined to learn more and more about less and less, I have always been attracted to such relatively broad practical policy concerns. In recent years, scholars and activists in many US universities appear to have become more ideological and less connected to or interested in how to effectively address concrete problems. I have been heartened, however, by indications that more young social scientists are now drawn to such issues, are developing good questions and answers, and are bringing these to the

⁵ These questions were brilliantly analyzed by leading participants in the Wilson Center's main project on transitions from authoritarian rule and in its landmark volume: Guillermo O'Donnell, Philippe Schmitter, and Laurence Whitehead, eds., *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975). I arranged the funding and logistics for the project, participated in all its substantive meetings, and contributed the book's prologue.

⁶ Abraham F. Lowenthal, ed., *Exporting Democracy: The United States and Latin America* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986).

⁷ Abraham F. Lowenthal and Katrina Burgess, eds., *The California-Mexico Connection* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1986) and Abraham F. Lowenthal, *Global California: Rising to the Cosmopolitan Challenge* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009).

⁸ Sergio Bitar and Abraham F. Lowenthal, eds., *Democratic Transitions: Conversations with World Leaders* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press and International IDEA, 2015). This work has also been published in Burmese (Myanmar), Dutch, French, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, and Vietnamese.

⁹ See “Venezuela in 2023 and Beyond” (Latin American Program, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, January 2023).

public square. In my final semester at USC, I worked with a graduate student, Mariano Bertucci, to organize an international seminar of scholars and practitioners to brainstorm the challenges of bridging academic analysis and practical policymaking together and publish a symposium volume.¹⁰

Learning how to draw on research and analysis to improve the quality of policymaking and the prospects for using policy to advance core values also shaped my approach to institution-building in the subsequent phase of my career. From 1977 through 2005, I spent much of my energy and time establishing and leading the Latin American Program at the Wilson Center, the Inter-American Dialogue, and the Pacific Council on International Policy in Los Angeles, based at University of Southern California. In each of these efforts, I worked with others to define the core questions that would frame our main agendas. In each case, we promoted exchanges of ideas and analysis among thought and action leaders from different national, methodological, generational, gender, and political perspectives. We thought hard about how to improve communication and mutual comprehension among scholars and practitioners, and between opinion-shapers and decision-makers. We developed ideas and practices to encourage bridge-building among the academic, business, governmental, and non-governmental sectors.

We sought out scholars with policy and entrepreneurial interests; business executives with analytic and civic concerns; NGO leaders with conceptual and institution-building qualities; and public officials genuinely open to ideas and people from business, academic, and nongovernmental organizations. For these decades, my vocation has been to reinforce policy-relevant research and to undertake institution-building to sponsor and support it as well as to make its findings available to and

known by decision-makers, opinion-shapers, and attentive publics. My approach has been deeply influenced by outstanding mentors and role models, almost all of whom lived precisely at the intersection of thought and action: Judge Charles E. Wyzanski, Jr. and his wife Gisela, family friends¹¹; McGeorge Bundy, my undergraduate honors thesis advisor and later president of the Ford Foundation; Samuel P. Huntington and John D. Montgomery, my PhD advisors; Tomás Pastoriza, the Dominican businessman and civil leader who supervised my Ford Foundation training associate opportunity and taught me more than any professor at Harvard; Albert O. Hirschman, with his contagious “bias for hope”; Kalman Silvert, Father Ted Hesburgh, David E. Bell, Ambassador Sol M. Linowitz, Robert F. Erburu and Warren Christopher—mentors on institution-building, political analysis, and life.

I have learned a great deal from other wonderful colleagues in academia, foundations, business, public service, journalism, and other realms, and from the United States, Latin America and the Caribbean, Canada, Europe, Israel, and elsewhere. I want to mention the following, in alphabetical order, with special gratitude: Robert Abernethy, Giorgio Alberti, Rolando Ames, Leslie Elliot Armijo, Cynthia Arnsion, Jonathan Aronson and Joan Abrahamson, Byron Auguste, Hannah Baron, Peter D. and Karen Bell, Rosanna Berrain, Alan Bersin, Sergio and Kenny Bitar, Tom Biersteker, Richard Bloomfield, José Octavio Bordón, Rodrigo Botero, Kathleen Brown, Katrina Burgess, Fernando Henrique and Ruth Cardoso, William D. Carmichael, Jorge G. Castañeda, Fernando Cepeda, Joe Clark and Maureen McTeer, Oliver Clarke and Monica Ladd, Peter Cleaves, Julio and Leonor Cotler, Luis and Mariana Crouch, Lee Cullum, José María Dagnino Pastore, Karen De Young, Larry Diamond, Jorge I. Dominguez, Richard Downie, Denise Dresser, Richard W. Dye, Susan Eckstein, Luigi and Carol Einaudi, Joe Eldridge, Albert and Harriet Fishlow, J.

¹⁰ See Abraham F. Lowenthal and Mariano E. Bertucci, eds., *Scholars, Policymakers and International Affairs: Finding Common Cause* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014).

¹¹ Gisela (nee Warburg) Wyzanski was my mother's best friend in Germany. They worked closely together in Kindertransport to save German Jewish youth from the Holocaust. Gisela settled in the United States, married Charles Wyzanski (the youngest Federal judge) and the couple were uncle and aunt figures to my sister and me in the years when we knew of no real relatives in the United States. I met Janet, my first wife, in their home.

Samuel Fitch, Ricardo Ffrench-Davis, Gelson Fonseca, Shepard Forman, Alton and Patricia Frye, Francis Fukuyama, Nathan and Lilly Gardels, Manuel Antonio Garretón, Gino Germani, Carlos Gonzalez Gutierrez, Louis W. Goodman, Prosser Gifford, Rosario Green, Nina Hachigian, Frances Hagopian, Peter Hakim, Edward K. Hamilton and Francine Rabinovitz, Ellen Hancock, Dorothy and David Harman, Jonathan Hartlyn, Orlando Haza, Jorge and Norma Heine, Vidar and Malin Helgesen, Carlos Heredia, Antonia Hernandez, Carla Hills, P.J. Hovey, Osvaldo Hurtado, Alice Ilchman, Maryhen Jiménez, Victor Johnson, Susan Kahn, Terry Karl, Robert R. Kaufman, Felisa Kazen, Robert and Nan Keohane, Celso Lafer, Ricardo Lagos, William LeoGrande, Steven Levitsky, Nancy A. Lieberman, Beate Lindemann, Justin Liu, Tom Long, Robert Lovelace, Ricardo Luna, Christopher and Sue Lund, Father Felipe MacGregor, Anthony Maingot, Scott Mainwaring, Luis Maira, Pedro Malan, Harold C. Martin, Vilma Martinez, Jessica T. Mathews, Ernest R. May, Cynthia McClintock, Thomas (Mack) McLarty, Jennifer McCoy, Doris Meissner, Anna Carolina Raposo de Mello, Willem Mesdag, Jack Miles, Maryann and Bob Minutillo, Christopher Mitchell, Tom and Kathy Moss, Edward Muller and Patricia Bauer, Gerardo Munck, Heraldo and Pamela Muñoz, Sergio and Juana Muñoz, Roberto Murray Meza, Arnold and Sue Nachmanoff, Sharon Nazarian, Luis Nogales, Monsignor Agripino Nuñez, Joseph S. Nye, John and Margaret Odell, Yukio Okamoto, Guillermo O'Donnell, Santiago O'Donnell, Daniel Oduber, Luis Pasara, Robert and Margie Pastor, Olga Pellicer, Michael Penfold, Teodoro Petkoff, Sonia Picado, Jacqueline Pitanguy, Jose Luis Prado, Jeffrey Puryear, Cassandra Pyle, Bruce Ramer, Larry and Lee Ramer, Carlos Rico, Liliana de Riz, Rubens Ricupero, Alan Riding, Christina Rose, Andrés Rozental, Paul Sack, Juan Manuel Santos, Ronaldo Sardenberg, Tim Scully, Thomas Shannon, Stanley Sheinbaum, Sally Shelton-Colby, Michael Shifter, Harry Shlaudeman, David Smilde, Edwin "Rip" Smith, Paulo Sotero, Pamela Starr and Roberto Suro, James Steinberg, John T. Swing, David Tang, Maria Herminia Tavares de Almeida, Shibley Telhami, Juan Gabriel Tokatlian, Sallie Mitchell Townsend, Viron (Pete) Vaky, Juan Gabriel Valdés, Arturo Valenzuela, Bernardo Vega, Salvador Villar, Andrew Walter, Alexander and

Judy Watson, Wang Jisi, Martin Weinstein, Daniel Weiss, Laurence Whitehead, Alexander Wilde, Peter Winn and Sue Grunewald, John Youle, Enrique Zileri, and Daniel Zovatto. Many of these and other colleagues have been *compañeros* in my academic career, and others have worked closely with me in institution-building efforts; some have played both roles, while others are long-term friends who help keep me grounded. Jane S. Jaquette, my wife, has been an incomparable and indispensable partner in all aspects of my life.

I have been drawn to each of these people and others in part because of their commitment to develop ideas to improve society. All of them have inspired and influenced me, as have other people committed to democracy and social equity, with high energy, zest for positive change, but also prudential instincts.

My approach was also influenced by the particular time in which I lived, of course. My Harvard undergraduate class, entering in 1957 and graduating in 1961, was shaped by the post-WWII environment, the Cold War, McCarthyism, Sputnik, *Brown v Board of Education*, the civil rights movement, and other major social changes. Our generation was imbued with the optimism of John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King, and the belief that we could learn how best to contribute to positive political and social change.

Many of the most influential courses and books that shaped my worldview were produced by a generation of scholars who understood from their own experiences the dangers of utopian populism and authoritarianism, and who pushed hard for democratic reforms. They included Hannah Arendt, Merle Fainsod, Carl J. Friedrich, Gino Germani, Louis Hartz, Albert Hirschman, Stanley Hoffman, Hans J. Morgenthau, Reinhold Niebuhr, and David Riesman, nearly all of whom taught me directly. These scholars, most of whom survived personal dangers arising from Naziism, fascism, and Marxism-Leninism, played important roles in educating our generation about the need for social change but also impressed upon

us the costs of violent revolution and ideological zeal, and the benefits of respectful dialogue and compromise.

It is disturbing to observe, as our generation passes from the scene, as theirs did, that the appeal of authoritarian rule to the disaffected and resentful is rising again, with great dangers for liberal democracy. This is increasingly evident, even in established democracies in the United States, Europe, Latin America, Israel, and other countries, as is increasingly polarized discourse and the decline of mutually respectful dialogue. Today's world badly needs the contributions of the kinds of forums and institutions that nurtured my career and that I contributed to. It is now up to a new generation to address contemporary challenges in ways that will galvanize positive energies and render some problems easier to solve.

Protecting the integrity of policy-oriented research forums

I conclude by sharing some experiences I had in helping to protect the Wilson Center's Latin American Program's intellectual and political integrity in a contested political environment that was still being significantly shaped by Cold War thinking.¹²

My initial experience with these issues began during my first week at the Wilson Center when its Director, Jim Billington, told me that he was disturbed to learn that I was involved in a proposed program to improve relations between the United States and Cuba. He advised me that no such program could be based at the Wilson Center, nor could a Wilson Center official play a leading role. Unless I assured him that there would be no Cuba initiative in the Latin American Program, he said, he would cancel the Program's launch event.

I told him that if I were contemplating a Cuba project at the Wilson Center, or planning to play an important role in one while at the Center, I certainly would consult him. His statement was misinformed, however. I was one of several people in early discussions with officials of the Ford and Kettering Foundations about a possible project to improve intellectual exchange among Cuban scholars and scholars from the United States. I hoped that such a project would go forward. If so, I might well want to be involved. I would certainly assure that any such personal involvement would be wholly consistent with my role at the Center, and I would be glad to keep him, as the Center's Director, fully informed. Dr. Billington then backed off, apparently recognizing that the information he had been given was both premature and inaccurate. The launch event took place as scheduled, but the question of how Cuba would relate to the Latin American Program remained an issue.

Some months later, our Academic Council met to review the large number of fellowship proposals that had been submitted to the Latin American Program's first special competition. The Council reviewed the files carefully and after thoughtful discussion unanimously agreed to nominate five applicants. These recommendations were presented to Dr. Billington, who had the sole responsibility and authority to propose to the Center's Board of Directors candidates for appointments as Fellows.

A few days later, Jim told me that he would recommend four of the five for Board approval. I asked him who the fifth case was, and why that nominee would not be recommended. He said he would not support Lourdes Casals (a Cuban American sociologist from Rutgers) because the quality of her proposal did not meet the intellectual level of the other nominees, nor the Center's standards. He added that he had checked his own impression with a long-time trusted colleague, who had confirmed his view.

¹² These incidents have remained confidential until now. Because I believe that understanding the tensions discussed here is a key part of building successful institutions to address contemporary challenges, I am including this brief history, drawing on detailed documentation that I will make available to others through the Library of Congress or another appropriate repository.

Jim did not say anything about Professor Casals' involvements in Cuba, first as a supporter of Castro, then as a critic, subsequently as an exile, and as an interlocutor with both the Cuban exile community and with some who remained in Cuba. I surmised, however, that these roles might well be affecting his calculations. I also believed that virtually any Latin American social scientist would assume, if it were to come out that she had been vetoed by the Center's Director, that this was because of her political sympathies. I also recognized that Dr. Billington's reservations might well be shaped by a prudential reluctance to jeopardize annual Congressional appropriations for the Center. Without discussing these thoughts, I expressed disappointment and said I would have to think about this. Jim said I was welcome to think, but that he had made a decision that was his to make.

After a fitful night, concerned that this decision might upend our careful efforts to emphasize the Program's openness, pluralism, independence, and integrity—at the very core of our initiative—I called Fernando Henrique Cardoso, then working with Albert Hirschman at the Institute for Advanced Studies in Princeton. I expressed my preoccupation about the implications of this veto for the new Program's reputation and for our ability to attract Latin American participants likely to be wary of Washington and to harbor doubts about a Center funded by the US government. Cardoso agreed that this decision could well undermine the reputation we were building for critical independence. He offered to talk directly with Jim and asked me to arrange a meeting.

Some days later, Cardoso came to Washington to meet Dr. Billington, after which he came to my office, gave me a thumbs up signal, and confirmed that Dr. Casals would be included among Dr. Billington's five nominations. Relieved, I asked Fernando Henrique how he had accomplished this. He said that he and Jim had chatted amiably about their shared interest in the roles of intellectuals in politics,

comparing insights from different parts of the world. Then he told Billington that he had come to Washington to discuss the Academic Council's fellowship recommendations. He assured Jim that he understood and completely accepted that the Academic Council's recommendations were advisory and that only the Director had the authority to submit recommendations to the Board.

On the other hand, he wanted Jim to understand that the Academic Council had unanimously recommended all five candidates. He said he had not yet consulted with other Council members but that it was highly likely that they would all take the same view: if our unanimous advice is not persuasive to you, then we clearly do not have your confidence and should resign. Impressed by Cardoso and his message, Jim nominated Casals, accepting the risk that he and the Center might be attacked for inviting an alleged Castro sympathizer to come to the Center as a Fellow.¹³

A year or so later, I received a confidential memorandum from Jim stating that it was the Center's policy not to invite anyone resident in Cuba to become a Fellow or Guest Scholar, and that no exception could be made except upon the written recommendation of the Deputy Director, concurred in by the Director himself. In fact, I had no prospect in mind for such a Cuban invitee but both the alleged existence of such a policy, and being advised of it confidentially, struck me as unacceptable. If such a policy were eventually revealed, moreover, I thought it would leave the Program and me an untenable position. I consulted an experienced and highly respected Washington attorney and good friend, William D. Rogers of Arnold and Porter, a former assistant secretary of state for inter-American affairs and then undersecretary of state and personal attorney to Henry Kissinger; Bill had invited me to work for him in the State Department in 1975 during the Ford administration.

¹³ A nice postscript to this account is that many years later, after Jim Billington had become the Librarian of Congress, and Fernando Henrique Cardoso had served two terms as president of Brazil, Jim presented Fernando Henrique the Kluge Prize for lifetime achievement, an honor intended to be a Nobel Prize equivalent in the social sciences. At a luncheon the next day for Cardoso, with members of the Library's senior staff, Jim invited me to sit with him and we warmly discussed our shared admiration for Cardoso.

At Bill's suggestion, and with his assistance, I drafted a response to Dr. Billington's memorandum, noting my surprise at receiving a personal and confidential communication stating that a purported Wilson Center policy presumptively excluded Cubans from participation as Fellows or Guest Scholars. No such policy had been made public, nor had it previously been mentioned to me or to the Academic Council. It seemed to contradict the Wilson Center's widely advertised status as a center for free international inquiry and exchange. If such a policy indeed existed, appearing to contradict the Center's public pronouncements, it surely must have been adopted by the Board of Directors, I suggested. I respectfully requested a chance to see the minutes of the Board meeting in which this policy was presumably approved and to have an opportunity to make the Board aware of my serious apprehensions about its likely consequences.

Jim soon called me to his office and requested that I return the original memo (of which I had retained a copy). Jim tore up its second page and asked me to accept that no such communication had taken place. I accepted his statement, but to clarify the situation, I soon arranged for the outstanding Cuban historian, Manuel Moreno Fraginals, still resident in Cuba, to come to the Wilson Center for three months as a Guest Scholar.¹⁴

Some time later I planned to devote part of the annual Academic Council meeting to an open discussion with Jim about the growing visibility and importance of the Program in Latin America and the strong reputation it was acquiring as genuinely pluralist, an open center of inquiry where Latin Americans and others of diverse tendencies felt welcome and comfortable. I felt that Jim would be pleased by such an affirmation,

reinforced by the Academic Council, and that this might fortify his personal commitment to the Program.

A few days before the scheduled Council meeting, Guillermo O'Donnell called me from Buenos Aires to let me know that a combination of personal and professional issues made it virtually impossible for him to attend. I told him at once that I understood and accepted his request, but added that this was unfortunate because I thought the Council meeting could be an important chance to firm up greater support from Jim Billington. Guillermo asked for particulars, and I gave him a quick update. He then agreed to attend.

When the time came for our Council discussion, Guillermo told Jim that he had asked himself during the plane trip why he was subjecting his body to two eleven-hour flights in less than thirty hours and why the Wilson Center was covering an expensive air ticket for such a short stay. He had concluded that the answer was the same in both cases: the shared conviction that building a first-rate center for reflection and exchange—where both North Americans and Latin Americans of diverse viewpoints, perspectives, nationalities, and methodologies could share ideas about important questions with the utmost openness and mutual respect—was a truly important enterprise, both for Latin Americans and North Americans. He was very glad and honored to participate with his colleagues and with Jim to build the Program wisely. These introductory remarks were compelling and opened up a very positive discussion. From that time on, Jim began to express more often and enthusiastically his own recognition of the qualities Latin American colleagues brought to the Center.

We eventually had two important further conversations about my political and policy work. The first, in 1980 (a US presidential election

¹⁴ Dr. Moreno Fraginals was the ideal Cuban scholar to come to the Program, as a widely respected authority on the history, society, and political economy of the sugar industry, so important in Cuba and in much of the Caribbean. I enjoyed several good conversations with him during his stay at the Center and, in later years, in Havana. See Alejandro de la Fuente, "In Memoriam: Manuel Moreno Fraginals (1920-2001)," in *Perspectives on History: The Newsmagazine of the American Historical Association* (October 2001) and Christopher Schmidt-Novaia, "Manuel Moreno Fraginals: An Appreciation," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 82:1 (February 2002).

year), came when the Center put into practice a personnel procedure requiring staff to report quarterly any professional activities beyond our strictly Wilson Center portfolio, even if these were carried out on our own time and away from the Center's premises. I reported on a minor consultancy and some external lectures and noted that I had written a memorandum on the Panama Canal treaties at the request of the Democratic National Committee and a policy memorandum on issues in US-Latin American relations requested by the office of Senator Edward M. Kennedy, who was then challenging President Carter for the Democratic party's presidential nomination. The Deputy Director asked me how much time I had spent on these activities, whether there were other comparable activities that I had failed to report, and whether I would consider it appropriate to write a draft speech for a presidential candidate, if requested.

The next day I received a memorandum from the Deputy Director, with a copy to Jim Billington, reprimanding me for undertaking what he termed "partisan political activity" as a Wilson Center employee. He suggested I might be in violation of the Hatch Act (barring partisan activities by Federal employees) and could be subject to legal sanction, and he forbade me to do anything on behalf of a political party or candidate without the Center's express and advance approval.

I contacted Bill Rogers, again on a pro bono basis. Within a day, he counseled me that I was not subject to the Hatch Act because I was not a civil servant or a Federal employee. My compensation came from foundation grants, not from Congressional appropriations. Writing an occasional report or comment at the request of a political party and/or an official, member of Congress, or even a candidate, was well within my rights as a citizen, and indeed not even prohibited for a Federal employee under the Hatch Act.

Furthermore, he thought such activities were fully consistent with the stated charter of the Wilson Center and with the duties of its program directors, and that I should feel free to offer my professional advice on request to any public official. I sent Jim Billington a memorandum along these lines; we met, and he quickly asked me to ignore the confidential memorandum that I had received from his deputy.

A final issue occurred in 1982, early in the Reagan administration, just after the *Washington Post* Sunday Opinion section featured one of my op-eds, vigorously criticizing the Reagan administration's policies in Central America. Jim opened a senior staff meeting by opining that, as stewards of a public institution, officers at the Wilson Center should not publish such commentaries. Henceforth, Wilson Center personnel should submit to him any op-ed or public statement we contemplated making, for his approval or his instruction not to publish. These remarks touched off a good deal of discussion among the program directors, all of whom objected to the announced procedure; Jim then dropped his proposal. The incident made all of us more aware of the pressures Billington obviously felt himself under, and more mindful of the tensions between emphasizing contemporary public policy issues in our programs and publishing our personal views on controversial matters.¹⁵

These incidents highlight the internal pressures and tensions that can arise regarding critical inquiry in a federally funded agency or likely in any organization subject to the influence of major funding sources with policy preferences. I believe the Wilson Center's enduring capacity to develop and maintain its reputation for open and critical inquiry and respectful exchange across national, partisan, ideological, and methodological lines was fortified by the Latin American Program's experience during its early years and by Jim

¹⁵ Some of these tensions are discussed in a chapter by Howard J. Wiarda (1939-2015) himself a Latinamericanist, a think tank official at the American Enterprise Institute, and a policy entrepreneur, in "New Actors on the Stage: Think Tanks and US-Latin America Policy," in his book, *Democracy and its Discontents: Development, Interdependence, and US Policy in Latin America* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1995), pp. 87-119. Wiarda's discussions (pp. 101-102 and passim) of the Wilson Center's Latin American Program and also of the Inter-American Dialogue are colored by his politics and are factually inaccurate in several respects but they provide relevant context for these notes.

Billington's consistent backing away from his recurrent impulse, whatever its sources, to limit pluralism and free expression. Indeed, Jim told me years later, when I visited him at his invitation in the Library of Congress, that he thought our "creative and dynamic tensions" strengthened both the Wilson Center and the Latin American Program. I agreed. I believe that the issues we dealt with in fact strengthened the norms of open and pluralist exchange that undergird the Wilson Center's enduring value. These norms require constant vigilance in the Washington environment, perhaps now more than ever. The norms that underlie pluralist, open, and respectful exchange—so important to the Wilson Center and other such pluralist forums—are not self-enforcing; they require standing up against their violation. //